



Assessment story

GCSE

English Language

Cambridge OCR Level 1/Level 2
GCSE (9-1) in English Language

Exploring our question papers

J351

For first assessment in 2017





About our new name

As of September 2025, our name is Cambridge OCR.

Students who sat an exam **in summer 2025** will receive a Cambridge OCR branded exam certificate (our new brand), which will be the same for all future exam series.

You'll continue to see the OCR or Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations name while we work to update our material to our new name, Cambridge OCR. This will take some time, and you can still access all up-to-date qualification resources and materials via [Teach Cambridge](#).

Important: We'll keep the OCR/Oxford Cambridge and RSA name on existing teaching resources while the content of these remains applicable to the specification being taught. **New and refreshed** resources will be produced using the Cambridge OCR name/logo.

Tell us what you think

Your feedback plays an important role in how we develop, market, support and resource qualifications now and into the future. We want you and your students to enjoy and get the best out of our qualifications and resources, but to do that we need your honest opinions to tell us whether we're on the right track or not.

You can email your thoughts to support@ocr.org.uk or visit our [feedback page](#) to learn more about how you can help us improve our qualifications.



Designing and testing in [collaboration with teachers](#) and students



Helping young people develop an [ethical view of the world](#)



Equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) are [part of everything we do](#)

Contents

Introduction	4
Qualification overview	5
Assessment objectives and weighting	5
Unseen texts	6
Assessment structure	7
The examined components	8
Command words	21
Accessibility principles	21
Our approach to marking	22
Spoken language endorsement	22
Meet the English team	23



Introduction

Our GCSE (9-1) English Language qualification has been available for first teach since September 2015. It is a skills-based qualification that supports students to engage with a range of exciting literary and non-fiction texts and to develop their writing skills. It can be taught across one or two years and is ideal as a standalone qualification, for taking alongside GCSE (9-1) English Literature, or as an accessible option for post-16 resits.

We've thought carefully about our approach so that our question papers are straightforward, easy to navigate and do not require students to jump through hoops in order to meet the Assessment Objectives. This is supported by our mirror-image assessment structure: the question papers for both examined components are two hours long; both contain two unseen texts; there are two sections each worth 50% of each paper (25% each of the final GCSE mark); questions have the same mark tariffs across both sections of both papers.

Our assessments:

- Are straightforward to teach – both examined components have a simple assessment that is easy for teachers and students to understand.
- Provide accessible and consistent question papers – the graduated level of demand to questions supports students' understanding throughout.
- Are engaging – each component uses relevant, interesting and diverse unseen texts.
- Offer a choice of writing tasks – a choice of two writing tasks is given in each question paper.

Our support includes:

- Named Subject Advisors available to provide help and support.
- A range of free resources available from our [GCSE English Language webpage](#):

Teaching and learning resources include:

- Delivery guides: teaching support/activities for course content and skill development
- Schemes of work
- Teacher guides (e.g. Approaching unseen texts; Reading skills; Writing skills)

Assessment preparation resources include:

- Past papers
- Candidate exemplars
- Practice papers
- Examiner reports
- [Active Results](#) (our free online results analysis service).

Qualification overview

Our GCSE (9-1) English Language qualification consists of two examined components and a Spoken Language endorsement. Students must sit both examined components to be awarded the qualification.

The qualification is marked out of a total of 160 marks. The marks, duration and weightings are the same for both components, as shown below:

Component	Marks	Duration	Weighting
Component 1 (written exam paper) Communicating information and ideas This component focuses on non-fiction texts and non-fiction writing tasks	80	2 hours	50%
Component 2 (written exam paper) Exploring effects and impact This component focuses on literary texts and creative writing tasks.	80	2 hours	50%

The Spoken Language endorsement is internally assessed by centres and graded separately. It does not contribute to the GCSE (9-1) English Language grade. Students will receive a separate grade for this endorsement: Pass, Merit, Distinction or Not Classified. All GCSE (9-1) English Language students should be given the opportunity to take the Spoken Language endorsement.

Assessment objectives and weighting

Assessment Objectives indicate what students are working towards and what they will be tested on in the exams. Every question in our examined components tests one or two Assessment Objectives. Our mark schemes indicate the Assessment Objective(s) targeted in each question.

Assessment Objectives are defined by Ofqual and have required, associated weightings. Exam boards must ensure that the weighting for each Assessment Objective is within the range specified by Ofqual.

The six Assessment Objectives in the examined components of GCSE (9-1) English Language, along with the OCR weightings, are as follows:

AO	Description	Weighting
Reading		
AO1	Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas. Select and synthesise evidence from different texts.	8.75%
AO2	Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.	18.75%
AO3	Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.	7.5%
AO4	Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.	15%
Writing		
AO5	Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences. Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.	30%

AO	Description	Weighting
AO6	Students must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.	20%

Both examined components assess all of the above Assessment Objectives. AO1-AO4 are assessed in Section A of both papers (reading) and AO5-AO6 are assessed in Section B of both papers (writing).

We have placed greater emphasis on AO2 and AO4 in both components. This means that students are rewarded more for their insight into the texts through analysis and evaluation than for the explicit skills of comparison. This has shown to be more enabling for a wider range of students when engaging with unseen texts.

There are three further Assessment Objectives for the Spoken Language endorsement. The endorsement is assessed separately from the examined components and does not count towards the final GCSE (9-1) English Language grade.

The Assessment Objectives for the Spoken Language endorsement are as follows:

AO	Description	Weighting
AO7	Demonstrate presentation skills in a formal setting.	Assessed holistically through competency-based assessment.
AO8	Listen and respond appropriately to Spoken Language, including to questions and feedback to presentations.	
AO9	Use spoken Standard English effectively in speeches and presentations.	

Unseen texts

GCSE (9-1) English Language is a skills-based qualification. There are no set texts for students to study, instead the assessment of reading skills is based on a range of unseen texts taken for the 19th-21st centuries.

Each of our examined components has two unseen texts. Students will be assessed on four unseen texts in total.

In Component 1, the unseen texts are non-fiction. One text is taken from the 19th century, the other is taken from the 20th or 21st century.

In Component 2, the unseen texts are literary: either prose-fiction or literary non-fiction. Both texts are taken from the 20th and/or 21st centuries.

The word count across both unseen texts in each component is approximately 600-900 words. The minimum word count for an unseen text will be just under 300 words. There is always a clear thematic link between the two texts in each question paper. In the exam, the unseen texts are provided in a separate reading insert so that students have space to annotate and make notes on the texts and refer to them alongside the question papers. Each unseen text has a short introduction explaining what the text is about. Some texts may be slightly edited or glossed for clarity to make them accessible to the range of students that take this qualification.

The themes of the unseen texts are carefully chosen so that they are relevant, engaging and accessible.

As each question paper is based around two unseen texts, students have greater support in the event that they find a particular text more challenging; one text can be used as a springboard to help their understanding of the other. The reading questions require students to look at the texts individually and then together (more detail is provided in 'The examined components' section below). This means that even if a student struggles with understanding a text, they will be able to respond to some of the reading questions.

Each examined component is 2 hours long. This timing allows approximately 15 minutes for students to read both texts.

Assessment structure

Component 1 – Communicating information and ideas	Component 2 – Exploring effects and impact
2 hours	2 hours
80 marks	80 marks
50% of GCSE	50% of GCSE
Unseen texts: Two thematically linked non-fiction texts. One from the 19th century, the other from the 20th or 21st century.	Unseen texts: Two thematically linked literary texts from the 20th and/or 21st centuries.
Section A: Reading information and ideas	Section A: Reading meaning and effects
Four reading questions based on the unseen texts: Question 1: 4 marks; AO1i Question 2: 6 marks; AO1ii Question 3: 12 marks; AO2 Question 4: 18 marks: AO3 and AO4	Four reading questions based on the unseen texts: Question 1: 4 marks; AO1i Question 2: 6 marks; AO2 Question 3: 12 marks; AO2 Question 4: 18 marks: AO3 and AO4
40 marks; AO1-AO4	40 marks; AO1-AO4
Section B: Writing for audience, impact and purpose	Section B: Writing imaginatively and creatively
One non-fiction writing task from a choice of two, loosely based on or an extension of the reading theme: Question 5: 40 marks (AO5 and AO6) or Question 6: 40 marks (AO5 and AO6)	One creative writing task from a choice of two, loosely based on or an extension of the reading theme: Question 5: 40 marks (AO5 and AO6) or Question 6: 40 marks (AO5 and AO6)
40 marks; AO5 and AO6	40 marks; AO5 and AO6

In Section A of both components, the four reading questions assess the Assessment Objectives in order and provide a graduated assessment structure to increase accessibility: Question 1 is the most straightforward and Question 4 is the most complex. As students work through each reading section, the questions help them to develop their understanding of both texts and provide a good grounding for Question 4, the comparison and evaluation question. To support students in balancing their time and cognitive burden, the relevant and named section of the extract is also included alongside the question in the answer booklet.

In Section B of both components, students have a choice of two writing tasks, both of which will be loosely related to the theme of the reading section. This choice enables students to make appropriate decisions for their level and respond to the task that they feel more comfortable with. Both writing tasks have the same marks and test the same Assessment Objectives.

The division of marks and Assessment Objectives in both components is very similar. Tasks testing the same skills are rewarded the same way across both papers to give students and teachers greater confidence in what is required for each question.

This mirrored approach also makes the skills across both components co-teachable so there is less requirement to approach the two exam papers as separate entities.

The examined components

Component 1

Communicating information and ideas (2 hours, 80 marks)

Recommended time allocation:

Read and annotate both unseen texts – 15 mins

Section A – 1 hour

Section B – 45 minutes

Section A: Reading information and ideas (40 marks)

This section is based on two unseen non-fiction texts. One text is taken from the 19th century, the other is taken from the 20th or 21st century. Each text is 300-400 words.

The texts are thematically linked.

Students respond to four reading questions based on the unseen texts.

Question 1: Information retrieval and interpretation (Text 1)

Question 1 is about **Text 1**, *The New Wizard of the West* by Chauncy Montgomery McGovern.

1 Look at lines 1–3.

Fancy yourself seated in a large, well-lighted room, with mountains of <u>curious-looking</u> machinery on all sides. A tall, thin young man walks up to you and, by merely snapping his fingers, creates instantaneously a ball of leaping red flame, and holds it calmly in his hands.	1
--	---

Line references focus students on a particular area of the text.

(a) Give **one** word that describes what the room looks like.
.....[1]

Questions assessing AO1i ask students to identify information in the text and/or to interpret information.

(b) Give one phrase that suggests that there is a lot of machinery in the room.
.....
..... [1]

(c) Explain **two** things that are surprising about what Tesla does with the ball of flame.
1.....
.....
2.....
..... [2]

There is a total of 4 marks available for AO1i in this component.

This question focuses on the first unseen text and assesses AO1i: 'Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas.'

This question is made up of part-questions that have a total of 4 marks. The configuration of part-questions can differ each year, for example, 2 x 2 mark questions; 2 x 1 mark question and 1 x 2 mark question etc.

Some questions will:

- direct students to look at specific lines in the text and retrieve information. The relevant section of the extract text will be printed alongside Question 1, indicating candidates must consult named lines of the extract.
- ask students to interpret the information in the text.

These questions require direct quotation or short responses (phrases or sentences).

Question 2: Synthesising information from both texts

Question 2 is about **Text 1**, *The New Wizard of the West* by Chauncy Montgomery McGovern and **Text 2**, *Net Prophet* by Lesley White.

2 Both texts describe a meeting with a famous person.

What are the **similarities** between these famous people?

Draw on evidence from **both** texts to support your answer.

[6]

.....

.....

.....

.....

Students are asked to make connections between both texts.

There is a total of 6 marks available for AO1ii in this component.

The connections need to be supported by evidence from both texts (quotes or textual references).

This question focuses on both unseen texts and assesses AO1ii: 'Select and synthesise evidence from different texts.'

This question has 6 marks.

This question requires students to identify similarities in an idea common to both texts, as directed by the question. These similarities should be supported with evidence (quotations or close textual references) from both texts. This question focuses on comprehension, connecting and interpreting information in the texts. Students do not need to analyse the texts in this question.

Question 3: Analysis of the effects of language and structure (Text 2)

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *Net Prophet* by Lesley White.

3 Look at lines 16-29.

His book's analogies lean on the pioneering past of his country, the internet likened to the building of the national highways, and technological advances to the search for gold in California, a search in which many are wounded and some are left behind, but the bravest and best march on to conquer a new frontier, Gates's wagon at the head.

Gates speaks of caution, but he is so wrapped up in the potential and possibilities of the Information Age that his excitement is almost childlike, his prophecies extraordinary. Most transforming of our lives will be the wallet PC, a combination of credit card, entry ticket and best friend: we will no longer need to carry our keys, cash or cameras – all will be contained in one small computer. 20

The history of the future is littered with ludicrous predictions, and equally with those who defied and denied progress even as it was happening. Gates gleefully tells the story of the Oxford professor who in 1878 dismissed electric lighting as a gimmick. 25

The point of genius like Gates's is being absolutely, arrogantly certain that you, just you, have got it right.

Line references focus students on a particular area of the text.

The focus is on the effects.

Explore how Lesley White uses language and structure to present Gates's vision of the future.

Support your ideas by referring to the text, using relevant subject terminology.

[12]

There is a total of 12 marks available for AO2 in this component.

Students are asked to comment on the use of both language and structure.

This question focuses on the second unseen text and assesses AO2: 'Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.'

This question has 12 marks.

The question will direct students to a specific section of the text. The relevant section of the extract text will be printed alongside Question 3, indicating candidates must consult named lines of the extract. Students are required to analyse the use of language and structure in this section in terms of the effects on the reader. Students are asked to use relevant subject terminology in their responses. Here, the focus is on using the identification of a particular feature as a springboard to explain the impact.

Question 4: Comparison and evaluation of both texts

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *The New Wizard of the West* by Chauncy Montgomery McGovern and **Text 2**, *Net Prophet* by Lesley White.

4 'In both texts the writers are impressed by the inventors they describe.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss what we learn about the inventors
- explain how far both writers are impressed by the inventors
- compare the ways the texts present the inventors.

Support your response with quotations from **Text 1** and **Text 2**.

[18]

Scaffolding bullet points are provided in this question regardless of the increase in challenge.

There is a total of 6 marks available for AO3 and 12 marks available for AO4 in this component.

Students are asked to evaluate both texts by considering the impact on them as the reader.

These bullet points relate to AO4.

This bullet point relates to AO3.

This question focuses on both unseen texts and assesses AO3 and AO4:

- AO3: 'Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.'
- AO4: 'Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.'

This question has 18 marks. There are 6 marks for AO3 and 12 marks for AO4.

This question requires students to compare the two unseen texts and to make independent judgements about them, prompted by a statement given in the question. Comparison includes commenting on similarities and differences in the texts. There is no requirement for students to analyse the use of language and structure for this question, but their evaluation of the impact of the texts should be supported by references to both texts.

Section B: Writing for audience, impact and purpose (40 marks)

The section contains two non-fiction writing tasks. Students are required to choose and respond to one of the tasks. The writing tasks will be loosely connected to the theme of the reading section. From 2019 onwards, these tasks will ask students to write a letter, an article or a speech/talk. Students may use ideas they've formulated in the reading section for inspiration in their writing.

Each writing task assesses AO5 and AO6:

- AO5: 'Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences.
Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.'
- AO6: 'Students must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.'

Each writing task has 40 marks. There are 24 marks for AO5 and 16 marks for AO6.

Question 5 – original writing task (optional)

5* Write an article for a magazine for young people to describe a new invention or idea that will change their lives.

You should:

- describe the new invention or idea
- explain how this new invention or idea will change the lives of young people
- describe what you think about how it will change lives.

Writing tasks will be loosely connected to the theme of the reading section.

In this component, students are asked to write a letter, an article or a speech/talk.

[40]

Scaffolding bullet points are provided for guidance and support.

There is a total of 24 marks available for AO5 and 16 marks available for AO6 in this component.

This question requires students to produce a piece of original writing in the form specified in the task: a letter, an article or a speech/talk. This question requires students to adapt their writing to suit the purpose and audience (if specified) of the task and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures with accurate spelling and punctuation. Planning space has been added to support and encourage students to think about their work.

Question 6 – original writing task (optional)

6* Write a letter to persuade a well-known person to visit your school or college. You would like them to give an inspiring presentation about the future.

You should:

- explain why you have chosen them
- describe how students would benefit from the presentation
- explain what you would like them to talk about.

Scaffolding bullet points are provided for guidance and support.

There is a total of 24 marks available for AO5 and 16 marks available for AO6 in this component.

[40]

Writing tasks will be loosely connected to the theme of the reading section.

In this component, students are asked to write a letter, an article or a speech/talk.

This question requires students to produce a piece of original writing in the form specified in the task: a letter, an article or a speech/talk. This question requires students to adapt their writing to suit the purpose and audience (if specified) of the task and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures with accurate spelling and punctuation. Planning space has been added to support and encourage students to think about their work.

As in Component 1, this question focuses on the first unseen text and assesses AO1i: 'Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas.'

This question is made up of part-questions that have a total of 4 marks. The configuration of part-questions can differ each year, for example, 2 x 2 mark questions; 2 x 1 mark question and 1 x 2 mark question etc.

Some questions will:

- direct students to look at specific lines in the text and retrieve information.
- ask students to interpret the information in the text. The relevant section of the extract text will be printed alongside Question 1, indicating candidates must consult named lines of the extract.

These questions require direct quotation or short responses (phrases or sentences).

Question 2: Analysis of the effects of language and structure (Text 1)

Question 2 is about **Text 1**, *The Cruel Sea* by Nicholas Monsarrat.

2 Look at lines 31–40.

Presently he began to enjoy himself.

Leaning over the bridge rail, he could see the whole forepart of the ship clear in the moonlight: above him, the mast rolled through a slow, gentle arc against the dark sky: astern, their wake spreading and stretching out behind them was bounded by a thin line of phosphorescence which gave it a concise, formal beauty. He felt himself to be in the middle of a pattern, the focal point of their forceful advance: here was the bridge, the nerve centre, with its faint glow from the instruments and the dark motionless bulk of the two lookouts marking each wing, and here was himself, who controlled it all and to whom all the lines of this pattern led. Sub-Lieutenant Ferraby, Officer-of-the-Watch – he grinned suddenly to himself, and felt, for a moment, almost heroic.

35
40

Line references focus students on a particular area of the text.

How does Nicholas Monsarrat use language and structure to show Ferraby's enjoyment of this moment?

You should use relevant subject terminology to support your answer. [6]

The focus is on the effects.

There is a total of 18 marks available for AO2 in this component across Questions 2 and 3.

Students are asked to comment on the use of both language and structure.

This question focuses on the first unseen text and assesses AO2: 'Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.'

This question has 6 marks.

The question will direct students to a short section of the text. Students are required to analyse the use of language and structure in this section in terms of the effects on the reader. Students are asked to use relevant subject terminology in their responses. Here, the focus is on using the identification of a particular feature as a springboard to explain the impact.

Question 3: Analysis of the effects of language and structure (Text 2)

Question 3 is about **Text 2**, *Where the Crawdads Sing* by Delia Owens.

3 Look at lines 15–29.

Explore how the writer uses language and structure to describe how Kya feels challenged by this experience.

Support your ideas by using relevant subject terminology.

[12]

There is a total of 18 marks available for AO2 in this component across Questions 2 and 3.

Students are asked to comment on the use of both language and structure.

Line references focus students on a particular area of the text.

The focus is on the effects.

As in Component 1, this question focuses on the second unseen text and assesses AO2: 'Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views.'

This question has 12 marks.

This question follows the same requirements as Question 2 in this component but focuses on the other unseen text. This means that in this paper, students are required to analyse the language and structure of both texts, fitting well with the literary context of this paper.

Students are expected to provide a longer response to this question for 12 marks, compared to Question 2 for 6 marks. The relevant section of the extract text will be printed alongside Question 3, indicating candidates must consult named lines of the extract.

Question 4: Comparison and evaluation of both texts

Question 4 is about **Text 1**, *The Cruel Sea* and **Text 2**, *Where the Crawdads Sing*.

4 'Both texts powerfully present young people taking control.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

In your answer you should:

- discuss the young people's experience of taking control
- explain how far the young people succeed in taking control
- compare the ways the writers present young people taking control.

Support your response with quotations from **Text 1** and **Text 2**.

Students are asked to evaluate the impact of both texts on them as a reader.

These bullet points relate to AO4.

This bullet point relates to AO3.

Scaffolding bullet points are provided in this question regardless of the increase in challenge.

There are 6 marks available for AO3 and 12 marks available for AO4 in this component.

[18]

As in Component 1, this question focuses on both unseen texts and assesses AO3 and AO4:

- AO3: 'Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts.'
- AO4: 'Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references.'

This question has 18 marks. There are 6 marks for AO3 and 12 marks for AO4.

This question requires students to compare the two unseen texts and to make independent judgements about them, prompted by a statement given in the question. Comparison includes commenting on similarities and differences in the texts. There is no requirement for students to analyse the use of language and structure for this question, but their evaluation of the impact of the texts should be supported by references to both texts.

Section B: Writing imaginatively and creatively (40 marks)

The section contains two creative writing tasks. Students are required to choose and respond to one of the tasks. The writing tasks will be loosely connected to the theme of the reading section. Some tasks specify a form, such as a story, and other tasks are more open to enable students to address the focus of the tasks as they choose, for example, by producing a descriptive piece or a piece of personal writing. Students may use ideas they've formulated in the reading section for inspiration in their writing.

Each writing task assesses AO5 and AO6:

- AO5: 'Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences.
Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts.'
- AO6: 'Students must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation.'

Each writing task has 40 marks. There are 24 marks for AO5 and 16 marks for AO6.

Question 5 – original writing task (optional)

5* *The Challenge.*

Use this as the title for a story.

In your writing you should:

- choose a clear viewpoint
- describe the setting
- explore how your character feels about the experience.

Scaffolding bullet points are provided for guidance and support.

There is a total of 24 marks available for AO5 and 16 marks available for AO6 in this component.

Writing tasks will be loosely connected to the theme of the reading section.

Students are asked to produce a piece of creative writing.

[40]

This question requires students to produce a piece of creative writing. This question requires students to adapt their writing to suit the task and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures with accurate spelling and punctuation. Planning space has been added to support and encourage students to think about their work.

Question 6 – original writing task (optional)

6* Write a description of a place where you had an adventure.

In your writing you should describe:

- what was memorable about the place and adventure
- how the adventure affected your thoughts and feelings
- the way you feel about that place now.

Students are asked to produce a piece of creative writing.

Writing tasks will be loosely connected to the theme of the reading section.

[40]

Scaffolding bullet points are provided for guidance and support.

There is a total of 24 marks available for AO5 and 16 marks available for AO6 in this component.

This question requires students to produce a piece of creative writing. This question requires students to adapt their writing to suit the task and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures with accurate spelling and punctuation.

Command words

Command word	Definition	Used in	Assessment objective
Identify	Select the relevant quotation from the text	Question 1 of both components	AO1i
Give	Retrieve information from the text		
Explain	Interpret information in the text		
Draw on evidence	Give the quotations/textual references that show the connections between the texts	Question 1 of Component 1	AO1ii
How does...use	Analyse the use of language and structure in the text; identify features of the text and use this as a spring-board to explain the impact on the reader	Question 2 of Component 2	AO2
Explore	Analyse the use of language and structure in the text; identify features of the text and use this as a spring-board to explain the impact on the reader	Question 3 of both components	AO2
How far do you agree	Make personal judgements on the texts in response to a statement; weigh up the impact of the texts	Question 4 of both components	AO4
Discuss	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the texts and the ability to evaluate the writers' ideas and perspectives		AO4
Explain	Interpret information in the texts to support the points made		AO4
Compare	Find connections between the texts, both similarities and differences		AO3
Support	Provide textual references/ quotations to support the points made	Question 2 of Component 2; Question 3 and Question 4 of both components	AO2 AO3 AO4

Accessibility principles

The principles and rationale underpinning our paper construction approach for OCR GCSE (9-1) English Language are outlined below. These make sure the assessments are as accessible as possible for all candidates.

No.	Accessibility principle	Why?
1	Layout (clear for all) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arial font will be used. Adequate space for responses. 	To make it easy for candidates to add their responses.
2	Tone <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Texts and vocabulary will be considered for currency and appropriateness for students. Language used throughout the question will be consistent. For example, usage matches throughout the question. 	To make it as clear as possible what response is expected.
3	Format <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Italics will not be used in questions with the exception of the introductions to texts. All text will be left aligned. 	Italics is used for the text introductions to distinguish them from the body of the text. To align with the principles applied to our modified question papers (left alignment is easier to understand for a range of visual impairments).

Our approach to marking

When designing our mark schemes we have applied the principles below to ensure reliability and consistency.

Mark scheme design principles:

- AO descriptor included at the top of the mark scheme for each question.
- Question guidance focuses on approaches candidates might take. They are reviewed before standardisation to take account of student responses seen by senior examiners in preparation for standardisation.
- AO descriptors and appropriate terminology inserted into each band descriptor.
- A clear descriptor present for 0 marks that is separate from the lowest level containing marks.
- No more than four marks will be used in any level for an Assessment Objective.
- Descriptions kept as short as possible while still covering the Assessment Objective.
- Clear marking guidance provided on approaches that may be taken.

Marking approach

All questions, with the exception of Question 1, are assessed using levels of response (LOR) mark schemes. LOR mark schemes are always approached in the same way, with the marks split into up to six levels clearly assigned to the appropriate Assessment Objective. These are marked using a best-fit approach.

Our examiners are given the following guidance to aid their marking of LOR questions (this information is also repeated in our published mark schemes):

Using 'best-fit', decide first which set of Level of Response Band Descriptors best describes the overall quality of the answer. Once the band is located, adjust the mark concentrating on features of the answer which make it stronger or weaker following the guidelines for refinement.

- Highest mark: If clear evidence of all the qualities in the band descriptors is shown, the HIGHEST Mark should be given.
- Lowest mark: If the answer shows the candidate to be borderline (i.e. they have achieved all the qualities of the bands below and show limited evidence of meeting the criteria of the band in question) the LOWEST mark should be given.
- Middle mark: This mark should be used for candidates who are secure in the band. They are not 'borderline' but they have only achieved some of the qualities in the band descriptors.

Spoken language endorsement

The Spoken Language endorsement is assessed separately from the two examined components and does not contribute to the final GCSE (9-1) English Language grade. Students are given a separate grade for this endorsement: Pass, Merit, Distinction or Not Classified.

The requirements for the Spoken Language assessment are the same across all exam boards. Students deliver a presentation on an agreed topic which will usually be of the student's own choice. They should use Standard English. This assessment requires students to give their presentation in front of an audience and to engage with the audience through gesture, eye contact and body language. The presenting student then listens and responds appropriately to questions and feedback.

The Spoken Language presentations are videoed and internally assessed and graded by teachers. A sample of recordings is sent to OCR for monitoring.

Further guidance on the [Spoken Language endorsement](#)

Joint [exam board exemplars](#) to support assessment of the Spoken Language endorsement.

Meet the English team

**Lydia Ridding**

Subject Advisor

Lydia joined the English team in 2023, after teaching English GCSE and A Level qualifications for 20 years in the post-16 sector. She is responsible for a portfolio of English qualifications, including GCSE (9-1) English Language, GCSE (9-1) English Literature and Entry Level English.

As Subject Advisor, Lydia supports teachers in delivering our English qualifications and understanding the assessments. Lydia speaks with teachers at conferences and network events, answers teacher queries and communicates with teachers via email updates and social media. She engages with stakeholders in the English community; reviews teaching and learning resources, CPD materials and examiner reports.

**Stephanie Wyre**

Assessment Standards Senior Manager

Stephanie joined OCR in 1998 and has had a number of roles from Subject Officer, Qualifications Development Manager and leading the Accreditation Team through the development of the GCSE (9-1) qualifications.

As Assessment Standards Senior Manager, Stephanie plays a key role in assuring appropriate standards for assessment processes and qualifications in line with regulatory requirements. Stephanie currently has a portfolio of English qualifications including GCSE (9-1) English Language.

If you are already using OCR specifications, you can visit ocr.org.uk/contact-us

Are you teaching or planning to teach OCR qualifications? - [Teach with OCR](#)

Get in touch with one of OCR's Subject Advisors:

Email: English@ocr.org.uk

Twitter: @OCR_English

Customer Contact Centre: 01223 553998

Support


Teacher resources, blogs and support available from: www.ocr.org.uk

[Sign up](#) for our monthly English newsletter.

[Access CPD, training, events and support](#)

Access our free results analysis service to help you review the performance of individual students or whole centres through [Active Results](#).

Contact the team at:

 **01223 553998**

 **ocr.org.uk**

To stay up to date with all the relevant news about our qualifications, register for email updates at ocr.org.uk/updates

Visit our Online Support Centre at support.ocr.org.uk

Sign up for [Teach Cambridge](#) to access your planning, teaching and assessment support material.



Cambridge OCR is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment, a department of the University of Cambridge.

Cambridge OCR is a Company Limited by Guarantee and an exempt charity. Registered in England.
Registered office: The Triangle Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge, CB2 8EA. Registered company number: 3484466.

We operate academic and vocational qualifications regulated by Ofqual, Qualifications Wales and CCEA as listed in their qualifications registers.

We are committed to providing a fully accessible experience across all our products, platforms, and websites. Find out more about our [accessibility standards](#).

© Cambridge OCR 2025. All rights reserved. We retain the copyright on all our publications. However, our registered centres are permitted to copy and distribute our material for their own internal use, in line with any specific restrictions detailed in the publication. Find out more about our [copyright policies](#).

We update our publications regularly so please check you have the most up-to-date version.

We cannot be held responsible for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and do not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

When we update our specifications, you'll see a new version number and a summary of the changes. While we do our best to reflect these changes in all associated resources on [Teach Cambridge](#), if you notice any discrepancies, please refer to the latest specification on our website and [let us know](#).

Our resources do not represent any teaching method we expect you to use. We cannot be held responsible for any errors or omissions in our resources.